Just Keep Scrolling…

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Anti-Social Networks & *the detriments of a poor Digital diet*

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As the basic economic principle of Supply equating demand goes in terms of marketing and social media, the higher volume of people or *'data sources'* on a platform, the larger the investment in keeping you on that platform.

This is because, and I feel predictably hopeless every time I spiral myself around a topic and find the same root-cause, *but this is because it makes that platform money.*

Algorithms and analysers examine our behaviour, know what makes us tick (negative, provocative content), and then employ a meticulous and demographic-specific methods of both entertaining, and addicting stimuli. Everything is meticulously manufactured to *keep us scrolling*

A digital casserole served 3 meals a day

Increasingly monopolising our digital diet, it provides us with the ability to subside boredom, and realistically never be, so.

The vast plains of data and virtual engagement has captivated the masses since its advent in the public sphere. Surpassing the occasional video or email response, we now engage with technologies in an unparalleled manner, never experienced before.

It's sometimes both alarming and incredible that, in only a few decades, this technological phenomenon has made pervasive and holistic alterations to how our lives are structured, and now we cannot go an hour without it, let alone live without it.

It has both economic and social utility; it can make you rich, you can leverage it with business or offer it as a service in exchange for a fee, you can use your influence and platform to earn money based solely off your publicity. It also acts as a social crutch. Waiting for the bus? Screen time. Feel awkward in a social situation? *Screen time.*

We live in virtual worlds. Most of us communicate more on social medias than we do in real life. It's unsurprising; the absence of discomfort, the easily avoidable confrontations and possible social shuns of face-to-face interactions do not exist in our digital boxes. We can see or read anything, from anywhere in the world, at any time.

One enormous, and equally unrecognised absence is that of *feeling*. This is a phenomenon that can be said for a lot of mechanisms and processes in our current civilisation, and it is that we discard *feeling* and instead fantasize '*being*'. We see amazing people doing things we can only watch in awe, and we wonder why we're not doing these things, or living *that* life.

Anything you do every day must have a pretty profound impact on how your structured, both neurologically and socially.

We're constructing a condition in which the focus on feeling is diminishing, and instead striving to be active, achieving and succeeding, perpetually.

A word for caution is amongst younger generations, including myself, known as *'Digital Natives'*. This term lends itself to those of us who have grown up with technology and did not exist before its widespread usage.

Countless research papers have suggested the *'use it or lose it'* approach, regarding screen-time and the development of social skills - Many allude to the fact that by spending less time engaged in real-life interactions, substituted for the soft digital bedding of the smartphone, we are worsening our abilities, or in some cases, never developing certain social skills, such as reading tone & expression or understanding empathy and compassion.

The blatant problem with this evidence, given the context of the 'Digital Native', is that we've never had to endure boredom in its traditional sense.

We've always had our digital crutch.

The claims still deploy a logical explanation – Fundamental elements of conversing are by-passed through texting instead of phoning, or '*Whatsapping'* instead a talking over lunch, including the fluent interpretation of body language.

Body language often tells us more about how someone thinks about a certain idea or subject, because it is obvious through their sub-conscious response. Alternatively, dialogue can be manipulated or skewed. Just as animals rely heavily on behavioural communication, we have the same intrinsic abilities.

Nail biting amongst times of heightened stress, looking down or avoiding eye contact when experiencing discomfort or gazing at the backside of one's hand whilst the other person talks warrants a sense of disinterest.

These are the queues we discard when texting, leading to miscommunications which when practiced over the long-term, can result in a lack of empathy.

Other detriments of social medias are somewhat malevolent, and more drastic alterations to how we perceive ourselves.

On the one hand, we have a spotlight to show case ourselves as individuals, meet like-minded people and share the parts of our lives we want others to see. Flip the coin and we have millions of *'semi-celebrity'* status individuals, who have all been told that their opinion deserves value and exposure.

People both admire and aspire to be like celebrities, who are, once stripped down and observed, brands. They use their platforms to disseminate and reinforce this brand.

There difference between fictional characters with fan pages on Facebook, and the celebrity 'official' page is minimal, except we all know that one of them is fantasy.

The content they post is carefully choreographed, to primarily appeal to their target audience, and then to construct a superficial reality.

I am deceived by this process from time to time and have to slap myself awake when I do. It's easy to discard critical thought and suppose that everything online is as it is in real-time. I mean, it's easy. But real life has boring moments, there are days when you won't do anything at all productive, days when you eat yourself into a food coma, or cry, and ruminate, and endure a heap of self-loathing.

Seeing these glamorous snippets from hundreds of individuals on your Instagram feed is bound to instigate some negative introspection.

We used to have access to the surrounding groups of people in our geographical proximity, who led similar lives and so we would feel structured and normal. Nowadays, proximity has been abandoned through accelerations in technological communications and data sharing, and now we are faced with bits & pieces of everyone's lives, everywhere.

Always stay Critical

Shifting the lens from those who consume data on these platforms, I want to look at those who disseminate information to the masses, curating culture and ideology, all the while.

With all the emerging news coverage on the manipulative mechanisms of algorithms to curate our feeds with ideas we might, or *should* consume, I'm slightly bewildered by the minimal amount of focus on the illegitimacy of a large proportion of click bait *FakeNews*, which is digitally contagious, due to the subsequent dissemination by individuals, by 'sharing' or actively engaging.

Those who manufacture clickbait, fabricated, ideologically injected articles rely on you to not think twice, and to not take thirty seconds to Google the sources and carry out come critical analysis.

It's You against the Web

To enact justice and fairness, we used to have trade unions, strong communities and discussion, which would permit a fair, majoritarian conclusion.

Now, we are ill-equipped with insubstantial knowledge on how to resist deceptive and manipulative online techniques used to manifest ideas, kind of of how inception works, although remember, you do not have the equivalent popular-culture status as Leonardo does.

Not only are we mis-consuming skewed data as credible sources, but the trends of skewed data which finds itself on our news feeds is also manipulating our wider outlook. *Cambridge Analytica*, for example, illegally collected, collated and analysed hundreds of thousands of Facebook users' personal data, and organised profiles, manipulating and coercing different demographics towards different political parties, using the alarming accuracy of algorithms and analytic tools.

Moving out of the Shadows and Going Dark

To abstain from the digital world is to have increased clarity of one's own interests and authentic ideas, but also more broadly, to have more autonomy over what you choose to follow, consume and believe.

Numerous accounts of Social Media abstinence have been popularised, showcased on TedTalks or shared over the very platforms they condemn. These self-subjects have almost entirely preached of the freed-up coherence they experience through cutting off their unhelpful online baggage.

Those extra few seconds you spend contemplating an idea may be the few seconds needed to access more critical thought, about who posted it, why it's on your feed and what the motivations, intentions and underlying ideologies are leading that post to your view.

Equally, curating your online consumption, cutting off detrimental pages and being present and conscious of your digital diet to ensure it is balanced will undoubtedly mitigate some of the vulnerabilities you susceptible to when surfing the world wide web.

It's all in the name, the World Wide Web; it can act as a network allowing you to swing through the jungle of limitless data and information, but more so like a spider's web, it can trap you like an unsuspecting fly.

To use the internet in moderation, remain conscious of the information being consumed and more importantly, retaining a sceptical lens and questioning what you're reading can greatly reduce the opportunity for symptoms of

addiction and manipulation to permeate your *coherent ability to think as an individual.*